CLAIM AMENDMENTS

Please cancel claims 5 and 29 without prejudice or disclaimer.

Please amend claims 1, 6-7, 13, 27, and 30 as follows.

1. (Currently Amended) A method for sharing resources across a plurality of computing platforms, the method comprising:

receiving a ~~resource access~~ request for a first server blade to access a shared resource hosted by [[at]] a second server blade ~~first computing platform~~;

using first firmware located at the first server blade, determining [[a]] the second server blade ~~computing platform~~ via which the shared resource may be accessed, wherein the first firmware implements an Extensible Firmware Interface (EFI) framework ~~and second computing platforms comprise a first server blade and a second server blade, respectively, operating in a blade server environment~~;

entering a System Management Mode (SMM) at the first server blade and the second server blade;

in response to entering the SMM, initiating an out-of-band (OOB) communications channel between the first server blade and the second server blade;

sending the ~~resource access~~ request to the second server blade from the first server blade over the OOB communications channel ~~computing platform~~; and

using second firmware located at the second server blade, accessing the shared resource, wherein the second firmware implements the EFI framework ~~via the second computing platform, wherein the method is facilitated by firmware running on the plurality of computing resources~~.

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2. (Canceled)

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the method is performed in a manner that is transparent to operating systems running on the plurality of computing platforms.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled).

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[5]] 1, wherein the OOB communication channel comprises one of a system management bus, an Ethernet-based network, or a serial communication link.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[5]] 1, wherein the target resource comprises a storage device.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the resource access request comprises a storage device write request, and the method further comprises sending data corresponding to the storage device write request via the OOB communication channel.

9. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the resource access request comprises a storage device read request, and the method further comprises:

retrieving data corresponding to the read request from the shared resource; and

sending the data that are retrieved back to the first computing platform via the OOB communication channel.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

maintaining global resource mapping data identifying which resources are accessible via which computing platforms; and

employing the global resource mapping data to determine which computing platform to use to access the shared resource.

11. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein a local copy of the global resource mapping data is maintained on each of the plurality of computing platforms.

12. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the global resource mapping data is maintained by a central global resource manager.

13. (Currently Amended) A method for sharing a plurality of storage devices across a plurality of computing platforms, the method comprising:

configuring the plurality of storage devices as a virtual storage volume;

maintaining a global resource map that maps input/output (I/O) blocks defined for the virtual storage volume to corresponding storage devices that actually host the I/O blocks;

receiving a data access request identifying an I/O block from which data are to be accessed via the virtual storage volume wherein the request is for a first server blade to access the data;

using first firmware located at the first server blade, identifying a second server blade ~~computing platform~~ via which a target storage device that actually hosts the I/O block may be accessed through use of the global resource map~~, wherein the computing platform comprises a server blade~~, wherein the first firmware implements an Extensible Firmware Interface (EFI) framework;

entering a System Management Mode (SMM) at the first server blade and the second server blade;

in response to entering the SMM, initiating an out-of-band (OOB) communications channel between the first server blade and the second server blade;

routing the data access request to the second server blade ~~computing platform~~ that is identified, the data access request being routed from the first server blade to the second server blade over the OOB communications channel; and

using second firmware located at the second server blade, accessing the I/O block on the target storage device, wherein the second firmware implements the EFI framework ~~via the computing platform that is identified, wherein the method is facilitated by firmware running on the plurality of storage devices~~.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, further comprising:

configuring the plurality of storage devices as at least one RAID (redundant array of independent disks) virtual storage volume;

maintaining RAID configuration mapping information that maps input/output (I/O) blocks defined for said at least one RAID virtual storage volume to corresponding storage devices that actually host the I/O blocks; and

employing the RAID configuration mapping information to access appropriate storage devices in response to read and write access requests.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the RAID virtual storage volume is configured in accordance with the RAID-1 standard.

16-26. (Canceled).

27. (Currently Amended) A blade server system, comprising:

a chassis, including a plurality of slots in which respective server blades may be inserted;

an interface plane having a plurality of connectors for mating with respective connectors on inserted server blades and providing communication paths between the plurality of connectors to facilitate in out of band (OOB) communication channel; and

a plurality of server blades, each including a processor and firmware executable thereon to perform operations including:

receive a resource access request from an operating system running on a requesting server blade to access a shared resource hosted by at least a second server blade selected from among ~~one of~~ the plurality of server blades;

using first firmware located at the first server blade, determining a target resource host from among the plurality of server blades that hosts a target resource that may service the resource access request, wherein the first firmware implements an Extensible Firmware Interface (EFI) framework;

entering a System Management Mode (SMM) at the first server blade and the second server blade;

in response to entering the SMM, initiating an out-of-band (OOB) communications channel between the first server blade and the second server blade;

sending the resource access request to the target resource host, the resource access request being sent from the first server blade to the second server blade over the OOB communications channel; and

using second firmware located at the second server blade, accessing the target resource via the target resource host to service the resource access request, wherein the second firmware implements the EFI framework.

28. (Previously Presented) The blade server system of claim 27, wherein the operations are performed in a manner that is transparent to operating systems which are run on the plurality of server blades.

29. (Canceled).

30. (Currently Amended) The blade server system of claim [[29]] 27, wherein each processor supports a hidden execution mode that is employed for facilitating communication via the OOB channel.